

Email newsletters – the key factors

Last month we realized that we had been sending out the newsletter for 5 years. The first one is here: <http://www.e-crm.co.uk/newsletters/2005/text-message-marketing.html> if you're interested, though why you might be is something of a mystery as it's a pretty thin thing really – apart from the mention of Robin Hood that is, a charity we still support, via their [Businesses Against Poverty](#) 'brand'.

That led us to thinking that a short article on what makes for a good newsletter might not be a bad idea and could even be a good one.

So what does?

It probably falls in to 2 areas – brand and technical.

Brand



Brand for a newsletter covers the target audience, editorial approach and tone of voice. Quite obviously, all of these have to work together to fit in with your company and marketing objectives.

Your brand has a personality which must shine through and whatever the subject it can't be boring – and let's face it a lot of people find anything that isn't about them boring. So, if you say the same thing over and over again in exactly the same way people will be turned off.

Your editorial approach is crucial. We decided right from the beginning: no selling. We try and write something interesting and useful about what we do and believe that if people find it so, then they will remember us and that will lead to sales.

That doesn't mean your newsletter has to have the same editorial approach, but whatever it is it has to fit in with your objectives and brand and be sacrosanct. People will soon notice if you move away from it and generally they don't like it.

Tone of voice. We all know that what we say may not be as important as how we say it. The tone of your voice tells someone else a lot about your mood. The issue with tone of voice in writing is that it's quite limited, you not only can't actually hear it (though you may imagine it) but you don't have all the non verbal cues that go with a real person talking either.

Essentially it's either 'formal' (boring?) or 'informal' (too relaxed?). It's still worth understanding what tone of voice you should adopt and then finding ways to fit it. Things like:

- Confidence
- Sincerity
- Contractions (can't, won't etc.)
- Appropriate emphasis
- 'PC' language
- Level of difficulty

all affect the tone of voice along with length of sentence, headline and subheading.

Good newsletters engage your attention it's not only the information delivered. That information is often available in other places too. We like a newsletter because of the tone of voice and perspective, we connect with the way it's written and its opinions. If we don't we unsubscribe.

Good newsletters also deliver timely information. A good newsletter tries to ensure that each issue will tell readers something that is important or interesting to them. Now that may be a 'statement of the bleeding obvious' but it still has to be said! You should be able to clearly state what it is that you think your audience will find interesting for every newsletter you send.

Technical



How you approach the technical aspects of your newsletter depends on its purpose and objectives.

What do we mean by technical? All the elements of how you deal with subscribers and recipients, personalization, spam checks, and the rest.

If you are 'selling' then you will find this more onerous as spam software programs run each email message through hundreds of rules that analyze headers, text, HTML coding, domains and IP addresses against block lists and databases and whilst you may want a word

like free in the subject line to make your offer clear it could get it junked. But if you're running a normal newsletter this won't be such an issue – though it still needs to be looked at.



But don't worry too much about rules. If your email isn't spam, you shouldn't match the rules. Even if you do hit an occasional rule it shouldn't score high enough to be a problem and if you are using normal 'conversational language', and being open and honest – not using tricks to bypass spam filters - you should be ok. The statistics show that it's the spammers that use the tricks and the rules reflect that.

Here are some other pointers.

If you're using HTML emails, use high quality HTML emails. Don't use tools which generate horrendous HTML (like Microsoft Word). They often leave signs behind (like empty tags, e.g.:) which are generally found in spam. Make sure your HTML is valid (run it through a decent validator).

If you're using HTML emails, include a text part in the email as well, for recipients (and anti-spam checkers), and keep that text as close to the HTML copy as possible. The closer they're related, the less likely your email will be seen as spam.

Make sure your privacy policy, including enforcement, and including query contact information, is easily found and clearly stated on your web site. It's good to include this information (where to find this policy, contact information), in your emails. Again, people who need to find out whether you're spammer will often look for that information.